Beneath the K.A.

Albert Goldbarth
1.
On the eve of his retirement, my father
darkens all of the house's lights but
one candle, and sits with his moon face
reflecting it fully, all night, the whole
skeletal, fissured, night long, till just the
old moon his smile is left
like a chair runner rocking his features
sleepy at last. That smile,
the shit it ate... He sold insurance, Hello
Mrs. Kojzki what a nice frock oh and look
how pretty Giselle is. The smile. His little
square of customers The Company sectioned out, each
year smaller, each month ten p.m., every day
three floors up: Hello Mrs. Partolini. The smile, a
rag he buffed his life with. He called it rubbing
shoulders with the world, how you got along,
how you got. And he had his reasons,
okay, I know, the Depression and his own father my
Grandpa Albert blind. The wink the smile. For every
penny a star darkened in the sky and
tonight, on the eve of his retirement, for the
gold watch, the last free star
blinks out. And the few that remain
burn the old constellation more clear
than a dictum against black expanse, 
The Kissed Ass, what
we live under.
2.
"Xmbert, it's so bad here! It's r Plepping!"
Ginnie, long distance “lonely” an army base
“and the creeps” an Iranian army base “drudgery”
teaching Iranian soldiers English “I... want... a... loaf... of... bread” She wouldn't
kiss, though it hung in her window all night
like a huge gouda moon, that constellation, Ginnie
wouldn't kiss. “can’t win” I don’t know a thing
about Iran “if you don’t play the game” but picture it
dead, a large dead length of dust and salt formations
with Ginnie going “loaf” lobe “no loaf, listen:
LOHF, now you say it” lobe Desperation
makes strange jobs “not that I didn’t have connections,
I didn’t want conneczhmp” The transatlantic
cable spasms and tics “My last job, The Academy of
Emorgeflee Pramkits, the day I saw the editor of
Plachpis Review flounce in with this pretty
blowfish on his arm and in the next grepstypish
issue there she is, Albert, with this
terrible poem.” I look it up. It's a
terrible poem. And Ginnie’s only connection
is terrible, sputtering through the water. “I’m delbmunk!”
And Ginnie isn’t pretty, just good. And a
loaf of bread never cost so much. And it’s night, at
least I assume it’s night for her (here, Chicago, a
fishbelly light says it’s day) and I don’t know anything
about Iran, or the Pentagon’s plans for Iran, but I
see Ginnie walking its dark salt fields,
the whole country clasped for a cape on her shoulders,
her burly shoulders, her shoulders she wouldn’t rub,
let the stars be a talcum tonight. Just once, soft
and accomodating. For her, for someone who didn’t
play kiss. I see her out there, telling the sky “loaf,
goddam you, loaf!” but it all comes back wrong.
3.
In his own time, in his own country, when the work was
done my father would fall from the world’s pincer-tipped connections
through the day’s last door, his own,
and leave his lips kissed onto his wife’s cheek, and rest
on the borscht-red rug or in the gray bath. But
first, every night, a kiss on the doorpost’s
time-blackened bar of mezuzah, its star’s six
points were the real address he drove home to —this as
prescribed by his father’s father in a more
transcendent land. It was a
kind of cleansing off of the long hours’ lies from his mouth
before the pillow
took his face into its dark spaces. / And

in my time it seems important, how
replenishing the homes my friends return to, what
banner above. In my country tonight, the sated fox cub
is an auburn blur on blackness with loud
henblood smearing the blunt end, and it too will curl
against a mother. A nurse is watching the clock, at a
quarter to three it’s a hug. A black whore’s
auburn wig rides thousands of bloodcolored rollercoaster cars
of stoplight glare up its ringlets. When she smacks a certain
latch open she’s a mother. The rest falls off with the boa.
Somewhere near Foster a barge’s store of oil finds voice
in a moan. Maybe from the oxygen tent a man beneath his aegis,
the clock at a quarter to three, is sitting up, rising
with time’s black hand for his last
aware fifteen minutes. So many,
so much . . . There are people I love with slow steps taking them
out of this for a while, to where they can toggle
light on in a room they know, and lay in a lap that out of caring
past sex makes no
demands and asks no questions. / Though
first it requires their strength to bypass
those other lit windows, a sort of constellation
set in the city's back, that say it's
warm in here and so cold outside tonight now
November's a shock in the lungs come
in relax oh and just if you will purse
up and kiss this little
ass at the door and then make yourself comfy

4.
And the cold frosts
terrible stars, gray
encroachments, up the window. My father
finally goes to bed. In a few more
hours it'll be morning here, Ginnie
can rest in her far Iranian night. His
teeth are false and on the bureau, it's a
way of saving the day's last, only
honest, smile "for Fan and the kids." Ginnie,
he couldn't help it. I love him, his were
different times, different responsibilities. Let the only
ones we can't forgive be ourselves. I know
how the salt builds, every dawn you wake and Iran's
a hard, mineral, taste on your pillow. It's
okay. I promise. What counts —really counts—
goes up to ten and we hold our weary faces in them.
Here's the homilies:
Everyone dies and everyone's buried, shoulders
rub world soon enough. Every stone was a star once.
Need isn't want. I promise: I'm
not so cold I'll pucker.